

Gottlieb Celebrates 25 Years with Atlanta Legal Aid

When Steve Gottlieb started as a staff attorney at the Atlanta Legal Aid Society (ALAS) in 1969, Woodstock had just taken place and Hippies were the personification of the counterculture movement. For this young attorney fresh out of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, the future was wide open. That is why, when it came time to renew his Georgia driver's license, he would only do so for two years instead of the more fear-of-commitment-inducing four year option offered by the state. "After all," he surely said to himself, "who knows where I'll be in four years?" Now, a full 36 years later, Gottlieb laughs at these old memories from his office in the same organization he started at all those driver's licenses ago. In the middle of his 25th year as Executive



Director of LSC-funded ALAS, he has no regrets about his decision to stay, having been at the helm of the Society for some of its most notable and important work. One such case involved the case of the Mariel Cubans from the early eighties. A brand new executive director at the time, Gottlieb worked with current LSC Chairman Frank B. Strickland and scores of other Atlanta lawyers to provide free representation to hundreds of Cubans who escaped Castro's clutches through the port of Mariel, only to be imprisoned without charge—and without access to a lawyer—upon their arrival in the U.S. ALAS staff attorneys also brought the landmark disability rights case of *Olmstead v. L.C. and E.W.* all the way to the Supreme Court, arguing successfully that

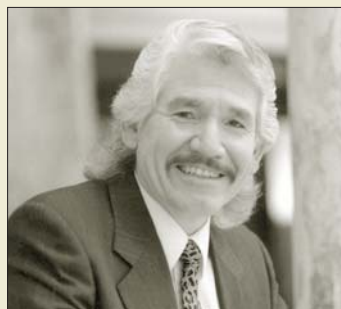
the Americans with Disabilities Act gives disabled people the right to live in the most integrated community setting possible. ALAS's victory in this case has improved the lives of thousands of disabled Americans by moving them from restrictive institutional settings to communities where they can begin to lead normal lives. While Gottlieb is immensely proud of the work his organization has done over the years, he has another reason for sticking it out for so long: his colleagues. "The number one thing that has kept me around is the quality people I've encountered at Atlanta Legal Aid," some of whom, he points out, have been there longer than him. "I've been incredibly lucky to work with people whose passions coincide so perfectly with the mission of the organization." Contemplating whether a 30 year anniversary as Executive Director of ALAS is in his future, Gottlieb says, "if the people are still the same people and if the work is still as exciting as I've found it over the years, I won't be leaving anytime soon."

Ernesto G. Sanchez—Idaho's Pillar of Equal Justice

When LSC's Board of Directors traveled to Idaho in October, they were in the presence of a pillar of the equal justice community. Ernesto G. Sanchez has served as Executive Director of LSC-funded Idaho Legal Aid Services (ILAS) for 26 years, leading the program through its transformation from a small two-office operation into a statewide program providing legal services to eligible Idahoans throughout the entire state. In a sense, the evolution of the organization that has been Sanchez's life's work mirrors his own personal journey from humble beginnings to notable accomplishments. Sanchez was born into an early life of migrant farmwork, traveling throughout the country toiling to harvest food for other people's plates. He was a mere five years old when he started in the fields, and he did not leave the fields until he had finished two years of college at Idaho State University. It was while working towards his Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration that Sanchez says he began to, "formalize, develop, and

strengthen my views regarding the denial of civil rights to certain classes of people, particularly Hispanics. The more I learned about the manner in which minorities and women were treated, the more I wanted to address the problem."

Law school was the answer. When he received his juris doctorate from the University of Idaho in 1972, he was the first Hispanic to graduate from the law school, and the first Hispanic admitted to practice law in Idaho. Law school was also where Sanchez learned about Western Idaho Legal Aid—the precursor to ILAS—where he interned during his first summer. "When I started with legal services we were little more than a divorce mill, doing mostly divorces and custody cases out of only two offices. The program was not well received by others in those days, including the state



bar and judiciary, because they were not familiar with who we were or what we did." Over the years, most of them under Sanchez's leadership, ILAS has evolved into a statewide program with a full case load covering all areas of law traditional-

ly handled by a legal services program, and has developed a solid reputation throughout the state earning the respect of the bar and judiciary. Still, Sanchez is not one to take credit for himself. "ILAS has a very committed staff, many of whom have been with the program for many years. Whatever achievements I have accomplished would not have been possible without the critical involvement of others." Sanchez was proud to host the LSC Board this fall, as it gave him a chance to showcase the legal services program that has not only been his life's work, but his life's passion.